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ABSTRACT

This one-page abstract summarizes the final report of a federally funded project titled, "Maintaining the Work Rate of Youth with Severe Handicaps." The study evaluated the effects of two self-management techniques, self-monitoring and self-solicitation of feedback with seven 18- to 20-year-old severely and moderately retarded youth over a 5-month period. Self-monitoring involved counting and recording the number of work units completed during each time period. Self-solicitation of feedback involved charting whether they had worked faster or slower than a specified standard and then discussing the chart with a trainer. Self-monitoring alone improved productivity for some workers on some tasks, but some workers' performance declined over time. With self-solicitation, productivity levels increased and remained at higher levels than during self-monitoring only. Results demonstrated: that severely retarded workers can accurately monitor their own work, that providing feedback took little of the trainer's time, and that work quality was generally maintained. Recommendations for trainers include establishing a measurement system for acquiring accurate data on work performance, creating a self-monitoring system manageable by individuals, establishing a system for self-evaluation and self-solicitation of feedback, and periodically checking the accuracy of self-monitoring. (DB)

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RESEARCH & RESOURCES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

ABSTRACT V
APRIL 1987

SELF-MANAGEMENT FOR SEVERELY HANDICAPPED PERSONS IN INTEGRATED JOB SETTINGS

A major expense related to the employment of handicapped persons is the cost of ongoing supervision to assess employees' skills and provide the reinforcement necessary to maintain productivity over time. This expense may be especially apparent in integrated job settings, where handicapped persons work alongside their nonhandicapped peers, and the general environment is not structured to meet the needs of handicapped persons. The reinforcement that occurs naturally in integrated job settings, such as praise for good work or feedback for below-standard work, has not proven sufficient to maintain the work behavior of persons who are severely retarded. If supervisors are asked to provide more frequent feedback, more of their time is required for assessing employees' work and providing enough feedback to maintain productivity. Effective strategies for assessing skills and maintaining productivity levels in integrated job settings without continuous supervisor presence are needed. Self-management techniques hold promise for meeting this need.

Maintaining the Work Rate of Youth with Severe Handicaps: The Effects of Self-Management is a 150-page report on the effects of two self-management techniques, self-monitoring and self-solicitation of feedback, on the productivity of severely handicapped youth engaged in restaurant work. The report also includes a review of six self-management techniques and their use with handicapped persons.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

The research compared the productivity of severely handicapped youth without self-monitoring, with self-monitoring, and with self-monitoring and self-solicitation of feedback over a 5-month period. Seven 18- to 20-year-old subjects whose IQs ranged from 36 to 54 were trained to perform five job tasks, such as busing tables and dishwashing tasks, in restaurants. Self-monitoring improved productivity for some workers on some tasks, but some workers' performance declined over time. When declines occurred, self-solicitation of feedback was used as an intervention: The subjects used their self-monitoring data to obtain feedback about their work from the trainer. With self-solicitation, productivity levels increased and remained at higher levels than during self-monitoring only.

SELF-MANAGEMENT METHODS

The method used for self-monitoring was straightforward—for each task, a unit of work was defined. For example, if the task was to wash pots and pans, washing one pot would constitute one work unit. Subjects used counters to count the number of work units completed during specified work periods and stopwatches or timers to time the work periods; they recorded the number of work units completed during each period in wire-bound notebooks.

The method of self-solicitation was also easy to plan and use. Subjects were provided with charts showing standards for each task; if they had worked faster than the standard, they recorded a + on the chart, if slower, a −. They presented their charts to the trainer and received verbal praise for a + and comments about needing to work faster for a −.

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RESULTS

- Severely retarded workers can accurately monitor their own work. Subjects' self-monitoring accuracy averaged 91%, ranging from 79% to 98%. Accuracy in the use of timing devices ranged from 62% to 100%, with an average of 86%.
- The subjects accurately determined whether they had worked fast enough 94.4% of the time (the range was 84% to 100%).
- Providing feedback took only about 60 to 90 seconds of the trainer's time per individual per day.
- Work quality was maintained for four of the five tasks, with an overall error rate of 7.2%. For the fifth task, retraining was used to reduce the error rate from 41.3% to 22.5%.

GUIDELINES FOR PRACTITIONERS

The author of this study recommends the following guidelines for practitioners wishing to use self-monitoring and self-solicitation of feedback to aid the performance of handicapped individuals:

1. *Establish a measurement system for acquiring accurate data on work performance.* In the absence of accurate data, it is impossible to provide accurate feedback to individuals.
2. *Create a self-monitoring system that is manageable by individuals.* There are numerous options for self-monitoring that make it easier to collect data about the performance of persons with severe handicaps.
3. *Establish a system for self-evaluation and self-solicitation of feedback.* Following self-evaluation, an individual can present results to trainers or supervisors to gain accurate feedback immediately upon completion of a task.
4. *Implement a self-solicitation procedure if productivity starts to decline.* If individuals have been trained to self-monitor, it will be possible to decide if a self-solicitation intervention is needed.
5. *Periodically check the accuracy of self-monitoring.* Periodic checks of the accuracy of self-monitoring will increase supervisor confidence in the information provided by individuals about their performance and aid in making data-based decisions about possible interventions.

Maintaining the Work Rate of Youth with Severe Handicaps: The Effects of Self-Management. August, 1985. 150 pp. David Michael Mank. Dissertation presented to the University of Oregon. U.S. Department of Education Grant No. G00-84-30020. Available for $.78 (microfiche) or $12.95 (hard copy), plus postage, from ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 3900 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304 (1-800-227-3742). Order ED Number 270 961.

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